

March 11, 2010

**Testimony of Marydale DeBor, Vice President for External Affairs, New Milford Hospital/Plow to Plate® Community Coalition**

RB 5419 - An Act Concerning Farms Food and Jobs .....and HEALTH!!

We submit this testimony in support of this legislation which would contribute to development of a sustainable food system for the state of Connecticut. At is national convention in 2009, the American Medical Association passed a resolution in support of practices and policies within health care and public health organizations that promote and model sustainable food systems; an action which builds on a report from the organization's Council on Science and Public Health. New Milford Hospital's food service program now procures as much produce and other ingredients from Connecticut farms as possible, but demand exceeds supply. If we are to feed our patients, and ourselves in a healthful manner, we must create support and incentives to "grow farming."

Community Farms are small farm businesses that provide jobs in the state...jobs that are becoming increasingly attractive to a younger generation that is committed to environmental and human well being..

According to 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, 64% of Connecticut's farms are under 50 acres in size. Since the CT Farmland Preservation Program continues to maintain a waiting list of farm applications that meet that program's size criteria of 30 acres or more of cropland, legislative leaders and farmland advocates saw the need for a separate and new farmland preservation program that would be able to work with smaller working farms. The creation of the Community Farms Program was enacted in PA 08-174.

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board has completed the scoring criteria which would be used by the Community Farms Program. The same entity has recommended a pilot year for the program at a level of \$1.5 million in funding. The scoring criteria gives preference to farms that have significant community support, including financial match for the state's investment.

\$1.5 million invested by the state could easily leverage another \$1.5 million in matching funds. The Federal Farm and Ranchland Preservation Program would be a major potential funder for the preservation of Community Farms, matching the state's investment dollar for dollar. Working Lands Alliance anticipates that the Community Farms Program could protect between 5 - 8 farms if funded at the \$1.5 million level by the state.

Many of CT's smaller farms are involved in direct to consumer retail, bringing fruits, vegetables, meats, and greens to our thriving farmers markets and farm stands. They are also the source of most of the farm-to-restaurant and farm-to-table harvest events, such as Dinners at the Farm, which attract tourism and contribute to the state's quality of life.

**Demand for local, fresh...and safe... foods already exceeds supply: enactment of this legislation will help to address this great need, while also promoting environmental and human health.**